

THE JACOBS REPORT

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MICHIGAN SENATE
Assistant Democratic Floor Leader
FOURTEENTH DISTRICT

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A.G. TO APPEAL SAME-SEX BENEFITS

Despite denial of his injunction to prevent the state from going forward with same-sex partner benefits for its employees, Attorney General Mike Cox will appeal the ruling that such benefits are legal.

Cox's request would have shelved the benefit ruling until higher courts could review it. A.G. spokesperson Allison Pierce confirmed that an appeal of Ingham Circuit Judge Joyce Draganchuk's ruling was coming.

TELECOM BILL PASSES 38-0

A major rewrite of Michigan's telecommunications law passed the Senate unanimously, effectively eliminating state regulation on rates while creating new controls on cellular phones.

After five hours of deliberation, a package of consumer protection amendments offered by Democrats was adopted in one vote with no debate.

Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) was not pleased with the politics of the compromise, noting that a conference committee between the House and Senate will now almost assuredly be needed to enact a bill before the current law expires on December 31.

Leading up to the Senate vote, critics of the bill had been encouraging consumers to challenge the measure, saying it would eliminate most of the state's competitive protections.

SBC, on the other hand, was pushing vigorously for passage of the bill, sending some 300 employees to the Capitol to help lobby for support.

In addition to deregulating the ability of the state to set phone rates, the bill sets basic local exchange service at 200 calls a month and eliminates the end-user charge. That provision, created as an option for phone companies to recoup potential lost revenues, has become a monthly feature of phone bills and an annoyance to critics of the largest phone companies, who question its need. Under an amendment from Sen. Sikkema, if a company wants an end-user charge, it will have to demonstrate the need to the Public Service Commission.

The adopted Democratic amendments also included provisions requiring PSC oversight of cellular telephone contracts, toll-free customer service lines, and a \$20 cap on early termination fees.

PUBLIC SERVICE COMMISSION: HEAT BILLS RISING

On the heels of this summer's high cost of gasoline and high electric bills, home heating bills are expected to show sharp increases this winter. According to the "Michigan Energy Appraisal" released by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), natural gas prices are expected to run higher than preliminary estimates suggested.

Although Michigan customers will still be paying less than most other states, residential natural gas customers can expect monthly heating bills to average 46 percent above last winter. These prices are expected to average \$12.30 per MCF, compared to \$8.42 per MCF last winter. In New England, natural gas prices for residential customers could go as high as \$20 per MCF. It will be months before the nation's energy supply returns to more normal operations following the damage caused by hurricanes.

The report can be found in its entirety at:

<http://www.dleg.state.mi.us/mpsc/reports/energy/05winter/index.htm>.

All Michigan legislation can be tracked at <http://www.legislature.michigan.gov/>.

State Senator Gilda Jacobs represents the 14th Senate District, which includes Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Farmington, Farmington Hills, Ferndale, Franklin, Hazel Park, Huntington Woods, Lathrup Village, Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, Royal Oak Township, Southfield, and Southfield Township. She is the Minority Vice Chair of the Families & Human Services Committee and the Economic Development, Small Business & Regulatory Reform Committee. She also serves on the Government Operations and Health Policy Committees.

Constituents of the 14th District may contact Senator Jacobs at sengjacobs@senate.michigan.gov or toll-free at 1-888-937-4453.

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